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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Discussion guide for the ministerial round tables to be held under the priority theme "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work"

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2015/6, on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council decided that the session of the Commission would include a ministerial segment to reaffirm and strengthen political commitment to the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as their human rights, and to ensure high-level engagement and the visibility of the deliberations of the Commission, and that the segment would include ministerial round tables or other high-level interactive dialogues.

2. In accordance with the multi-year programme of work of the Commission, as contained in Economic and Social Council resolution 2016/3, the Commission will consider "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work" as its priority theme for the sixty-first session, to be held in 2017. Further to that decision, it is proposed that, at that session, the Commission hold ministerial round tables to provide ministers with opportunities for high-level engagement on key issues arising under the priority theme.

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II. Organizational matters

A. Theme and topics

3. Under the priority theme "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work", the Commission will hold four ministerial round tables, on the following topics:

(a) Gender pay gaps in the public and private sectors: how can equal pay for work of equal value be achieved in the changing world of work?

(b) Technology changing the world of work: how can technology and innovation be harnessed to accelerate women's economic empowerment?

(c) Informal and non-standard work: what policies can effectively support women's economic empowerment?

(d) Full and productive employment and decent work for all: how can Sustainable Development Goal 8 be realized for women by 2030?

4. The ministerial round tables should focus on an exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the proposed topics. Ministers will be encouraged to look ahead towards realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as their human rights. Ministers will be encouraged to highlight the steps and measures that are necessary and planned in order to ensure that national responses effectively contribute to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and to the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

B. Participants

5. The ministerial round tables will provide ministers attending the sixty-first session of the Commission with the opportunity to engage in dialogue and discussion. They will be open to all Member States and observers.

6. Ministers are invited to indicate, in advance and preferably no later than 28 February 2017, the ministerial round table in which they would prefer to participate, with one backup option. Approximately 15 to 20 ministers are expected to participate in each round table. The Chairs of the ministerial round tables will have a list of ministers who have signed up for each round table, but no list of speakers will be prepared in advance.

C. Times and locations

7. The ministerial round tables will be held at Headquarters in New York on Monday, 13 March 2017, from 3 to 6 p.m., at the times set out below. The locations of the conference rooms will be announced in the *Journal of the United Nations*, closer to the date of the opening of the session.

Round table	*Time*	*Location*
Gender pay gaps in the public and private sectors: how can equal pay for work of equal value be achieved in the changing world of work?	3-4.30 p.m.	Conference room ___
Technology changing the world of work: how can technology and innovation be harnessed to accelerate women's economic empowerment?	4.30-6 p.m.	Conference room ___
Informal and non-standard work: what policies can effectively support women's economic empowerment?	3-4.30 p.m.	Conference room ___
Full and productive employment and decent work for all: how can Sustainable Development Goal 8 be realized for women by 2030?	4.30-6 p.m.	Conference room ___

8. The Chairs of the ministerial round tables will guide the discussion with a view to promoting interactivity. Interventions will not exceed three minutes, and an emphasis will be placed on dialogue. Ministers will be encouraged to ask questions and comment on interventions made during the dialogue. Time permitting, ministers may be given the opportunity to make more than one intervention. Written statements are strongly discouraged.

D. Outcome

9. The outcomes of the ministerial round tables will be in the form of Chairs' summaries.

III. Items for discussion in the ministerial round tables

A. Background

10. The priority theme of the sixty-first session of the Commission, in 2017, is "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work". The context for the session is shaped by the twentieth anniversary and global review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its outcome, set out in Commission on the Status of Women resolution 59/1 (see E/2015/27); the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development; and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

11. The Beijing Platform for Action focuses on women's economic rights and independence, and on the key linkages between women's economic empowerment and their voice, agency and decision-making in the private and public spheres. The

Platform for Action emphasizes equal access to resources and employment under appropriate working conditions, the elimination of discrimination and segregation at work and the harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men. The 20-year review of its implementation in 2015 brought renewed attention to the situation of women in the world of work, and to the need to accelerate the closing of gender gaps therein.

12. Globally, the gender gap in labour force participation is persistent and striking. Half of women are in the labour force, compared with more than three quarters of men, reflecting the overall stagnation of women's participation in the labour force since the 1990s. Those women who are in the labour force experience gender-based sectoral and occupational segregation and differences in working time, which contribute to a global gender wage gap of 24 per cent. The disproportionate time and effort women spend on unpaid care and domestic work remains a constraint on their capacity to engage in paid work, pursue educational opportunities, participate fully in community life and realize their rights and well-being.

13. Eight years after the global financial crisis, economic recovery continues to be uneven and uncertain in parts of the world. Slower than expected growth rates are contributing to higher than expected unemployment, with serious consequences for young people, particularly young women. At the same time, the world of work is being transformed by globalized capital flows, technological and digital developments and the increasing mobility and informality of labour that link developed and developing regions. Those changes form the broader context for women's economic empowerment.

14. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda affirm the crucial importance of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, sustained and inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment, decent work for all and equal pay for work of equal value. Gender equality and women's economic empowerment are prerequisites for sustainable development and inclusive and equitable growth. Access to decent, good-quality paid work is the most important factor in economic empowerment, allowing women greater agency and economic independence, and enhancing women's access to resources and participation in decision-making in the household and in the wider community and economy.[1]

15. During the round tables, ministers will be invited to discuss the questions below and to focus on what needs to be done to accelerate the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to realize women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work. Ministers are encouraged to identify effective policies, what needs to be done and who will take the required steps and measures. Ministers are also encouraged to make use of the present discussion guide and to consult the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme for the sixty-first session (E/CN.6/2017/3).

[1] United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* (New York, 2015).

B. Discussion guide

Gender pay gaps in the public and private sectors: how can equal pay for work of equal value be achieved in the changing world of work?

16. Sixty-five years after the adoption of the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), of the International Labour Organization, gender pay gaps remain pervasive across all regions and sectors. Despite the advances in many parts of the world in securing formal employment for women and raising their educational levels, sometimes to levels that exceed those of men, gender pay gaps characterize all labour markets. The gender pay gap, defined as the gap in average wages paid to women compared with those paid to men, is a major cause of an overall lifetime income gap between men and women. Women are systematically paid less than men for work of equal value. The gender pay gap is estimated to be 24 per cent globally. Although it varies in size, it is persistent in all countries. At every level of education, women on average earn less than men. These gender gaps reflect different treatment in the labour market as a result of discrimination, occupational segregation and greater constraints on women when it comes to balancing paid work and family responsibilities. Where women are concentrated in the informal economy, which is the case for most women workers around the globe, the challenge of achieving equal remuneration is greater because it would involve extending formal employment status and protections to those who work informally.[2]

17. In some countries, increasing the minimum wage has had a significant impact on gender pay gaps. Other countries have taken steps to enact legislation that prohibits discrimination against women in hiring, training and promotion, and to repeal laws that restrict women's access to certain occupations. Other measures include improving the valuation of women's work through strengthening legal and collective regulation and undertaking gender pay audits. Yet other measures involve increasing public sector employment for women, since research indicates that the gender pay gap is greater in the private sector than in the public sector.

18. Ministers are invited to discuss the following questions during the dialogue:

(a) What are examples of effective national laws, policies and regulations that have helped to reduce gender pay gaps?

(b) What steps can Governments take to ensure that women are paid the same as men for work of equal value in the private sector?

(c) How have measures to eliminate gender-based labour market discrimination and occupational segregation or to promote better work-life balance contributed to reducing gender pay gaps?

Technology changing the world of work: opportunities and challenges for women's economic empowerment

19. Technological and digital developments, for example, automation, robotics, 3D printing and connectivity, are transforming the world of work. The digital acceleration of the production of and trade in goods and services globally has been

[2] International Labour Organization, *Women at Work: Trends 2016* (Geneva, 2016).

facilitated by the more than 7 billion mobile phone subscriptions, 2.3 billion people with smartphones and 3.2 billion people connected to the Internet, including 1.3 billion women. These have also facilitated access by women and men in different sectors and at various income levels to banking, financial and information services. Mobile phone access is credited with spurring women's entrepreneurship in many countries. Even so, gender gaps exist. More than 3 billion people in low- and middle-income countries do not own mobile phones; 1.7 billion of them are women. A worldwide gender gap of 12 per cent in Internet use was found in 2016; the gap was 30.9 per cent in the least developed countries.[3]

20. The potential disappearance of jobs through technological change and automation is a source of concern. Some estimates indicate that more than 7 million jobs are at risk in the world's largest economies over the next five years, principally in office and administrative services, manufacturing and production, and health care. In this scenario, women will lose jobs, since they are less likely to be employed in sectors in which the adoption of new technology will create jobs, resulting in a widening of the gender gap. It is anticipated that women will lose five jobs for every job gained; by comparison, men will lose three jobs for every job gained. Women's relatively low participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics professions, in which jobs are expected to be created, results in women standing to gain only one new job in those professions for every 20 lost in other areas, whereas the ratio for men is one new job for every four lost elsewhere.[4]

21. Digital fluency may help to close some gender gaps. If the pace at which women become frequent users of digital technologies is doubled, the workplace could reach gender equality much faster than many current estimates predict. High instability in the supply of skilled labour across all job categories is a major recruitment challenge, especially for job openings requiring basic literacy in digital technologies or science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Given women's rising education levels in science, technology, engineering and mathematics in some countries, women could have significant potential in the global workforce. While men outscored women in digital fluency in all countries, that gap is narrowing and digital fluency could support educational attainment, as well as advancement in the workplace, for both women and men.[5]

22. Ministers are invited to discuss the following questions during the dialogue:

(a) What are examples of national policies that have increased access by women to digital and mobile technologies for economic empowerment, including by women in remote areas and/or in the lowest income quintile?

(b) What measures have been taken in both the public and private sectors to channel technological and digital changes to create jobs for women?

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[3] International Telecommunications Union, *Measuring the Information Society Report 2016* (Geneva, 2016); and GSMA Connected Women, "Bridging the gender gap: mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries" (2015).

[4] World Economic Forum, *The Future of Jobs: Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Geneva, 2016).

[5] Julie Sweet, "Access to digital technology accelerates global gender equality", *Harvard Business Review* (17 May 2016).

(c) How can Governments encourage public and private investment in increasing women's digital fluency and literacy in science, technology, engineering and mathematics?

Informal and non-standard work: what policies can effectively support women's economic empowerment?

23. Over the past two decades, the informal economy has come to dominate the world of work in both developing and developed countries (where it may be called "non-standard work"). The informal economy encompasses more than half the workforce worldwide, and women are overrepresented in it around the globe; in developing countries, the informal sector is the primary source of employment for women. While a defining feature of informal employment is the lack of social protection and labour rights, for women workers it is also marked by occupational segregation, gender wage gaps, unequal access to resources and disproportionate burdens of unpaid care and domestic work. Paid domestic work, home-based work, street vending and waste-picking are all sectors dominated by women; they also tend to be the most vulnerable and precarious forms of informal employment. Women comprise more than 80 per cent of homeworkers (industrial outworkers), 30-90 per cent of street vendors and 83 per cent of the world's 53 million domestic workers. Globally, 57 per cent of domestic workers (29.7 million individuals) have no limitations on their working hours.[6]

24. In developed countries, non-standard employment arrangements are increasing and a large proportion of the workforce receives limited benefits and social protection. Part-time employment, one of the forms of non-standard work, ranges between 25 and 37 per cent in selected Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries; the aftermath of the global financial crisis showed an increase in involuntary part-time employment. Working part-time is often described as a choice women make to spend time on domestic and care responsibilities, and is thus considered "voluntary". However, social norms, cultural constraints and the extent of public support for childcare, health care and basic income security for children determine the degree to which women choose part-time work and reduced earnings. Occupational segregation, including stereotyping of part-time jobs as "women's work", means that some women who need to work full-time may only be able to obtain part-time jobs.[7] An emerging area of non-standard employment is the on-demand and gig economy, which operates through online platforms that connect firms with workers, potentially on a global basis.

25. Measures to make informal employment more economically viable and to provide social protection are therefore a priority for tackling gender gaps and advancing women's economic empowerment. This requires a multifaceted approach that considers the specific circumstances in different parts of the informal economy. Labour market interventions such as minimum wages can be extended and enforced for some women informal workers, such as those working in domestic service,

[6] International Labour Organization (ILO) and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, 2nd ed. (Geneva, ILO, 2013).

[7] International Labour Organization, *Non-Standard Employment around the World: Understanding Challenges, Shaping Prospects* (Geneva, 2016).

home-based work and small enterprises. Social protection schemes, including universal systems and social protection floors, along with measures such as universal health coverage, non-contributory pensions, maternity and parental leave, basic income security for children and public works programmes, are all policy options that have been applied in different countries.

26. Ministers are invited to discuss the following questions during the dialogue:

(a) What measures are Governments taking to address the rising informality and non-standard forms of work and create favourable environments for all women workers?

(b) What steps are Governments taking to extend social protection coverage to women workers in the informal economy?

(c) How can part-time work be regulated to provide both flexibility for women workers and basic childcare, health care and income security?

Full and productive employment and decent work for all: how can Sustainable Development Goal 8 be realized for women by 2030?

27. The aim of Sustainable Development Goal 8 is to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all". It is estimated that over 600 million new jobs, or around 40 million per year, need to be created by 2030 just to keep pace with the growth of the global working age population. Conditions also need to be improved for the 780 million women and men who are working but not earning enough to lift themselves and their families out of poverty and earn more than $2 a day.[8]

28. Jobs in small and medium-sized enterprises account for half of formal employment worldwide; in developing countries, they comprise largest share of employment. While women entrepreneurs account for a third of businesses in the formal economy worldwide, the majority in developing and emerging economies are microenterprises and small enterprises in the informal economy, with little growth potential. Entrepreneurship can be an important vehicle for women's economic empowerment, leading to improved income and contributing to poverty reduction at the household and community levels. Yet, discriminatory social norms and family responsibilities can prevent women from even starting a business. Structural barriers, such as discriminatory property and inheritance laws, and other policies and regulations inhibit women's entrepreneurship, restricting their access to markets, financial services and products, infrastructure, procurement opportunities and social protection.

29. Policies to generate employment generally target the private sector as the main engine for employment growth, but the public sector is also an important source of jobs. Furthermore, it provides services that benefit both the economy and society more broadly. Women working in the public sector are concentrated in health, education and care services, which both support and reduce women's unpaid care and domestic work. Among the policy options available to Governments to increase the number of decent jobs for women are those which stimulate economic activity

[8] International Labour Organization, "Decent work and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", available from http://ilo.org/global/topics/sdg-2030/lang--en/index.htm.

and increase the demand for labour, and investments in public services to create decent jobs in health, education, child and elder care, public administration and agricultural extension services.

30. Ministers are invited to discuss the following questions during the dialogue:

(a) What measures are Governments taking to stimulate public provision of full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men?

(b) What kinds of incentives and regulations have encouraged the private sector to create decent work for women?

(c) How can Governments encourage women's entrepreneurship in the context of decent work? What policies have successfully removed structural barriers and enabled women to access finance, technology, markets, procurement opportunities, skills development and social protection?